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ABSTRACT

Five position papers from the American Association of Community and Junior College's (AACJC) task force on small and rural community colleges are presented. On the issue of equal opportunity for the small/rural college, the task force asserts that public policy-making bodies must provide for comprehensiveness in curriculum and in services in all its community college units regardless of size or geographic location. In regard to financing, it is felt that equity in funding in any state system of public and community colleges depends upon the inclusion of some means, mathematical or other, of allowing for the higher costs of operation per unit within the smaller, rural community college. In regard to small colleges and accrediting agencies, it is stressed that any judgements should entail a preponderance of weight resting with representatives from peer institutions. In the area of federal and state constraints on small college programs, the task force emphasizes that federal funds are not serving to equalize education for students of two-year colleges. In respect to developing the literature and research support of rural community colleges, it is recommended that an AACJC monograph on rural colleges include an updated bibliography, that a collection of literature be established, that AACJC stimulate research, and that the AACJC Journal devote an issue to rural community colleges. (Author/MB)

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POSITION PAPERS

TASK FORCE OF THE SMALL/RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

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JC 790 117

October 25-27, 1976

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THE CHARGE OF THE TASK FORCE

In response to both formal and informal expressions from representatives of the 600 or so institutions within the Association which consider themselves to be rural and/or small and to have special and unique problems related to this characteristic, the Board of Directors established this Task Force on the Rural Community College. The Chairman of the Board charged the Task Force to "focus on issues of concern to community colleges enrolling small numbers of people but serving large geographical areas."

The charge stated that it was a possibility that certain funding practices used by states may be unrealistic for the small college and thus penalize its students. It suggests that this and "other critical issues confronting rural community colleges" be examined. It stated that "the objective of the Task Force would be to identify and discuss these issues and agree on what should be done or at least what should be tried." It was mentioned that the Task Force's recommendations might take the form of position papers, proposal actions for AACJC, or actions for other organizations or governmental agencies.

These position papers are the Task Force's first effort to meet this charge.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SMALL/RURAL COLLEGE

One of the fundamental philosophical tenets upon which the American democracy is founded is that of equal opportunity. Our political system, economic system, and social institutions all reflect this basic value. Throughout the two hundred years of the nation's history, the meanings of this premise of equal opportunity has been constantly expanded by both legal and extra-legal change. Since equality of educational opportunity underlies and undergirds all other forms of individual liberty to attain one's goals in life, it is incumbent upon a democratic society to bring such opportunities within the reach of all regardless of economic class, ethnicity, or any other element of circumstance--including the geographic separation of space occupied.

The public policy making bodies of each state (coordinating boards, public planning agencies, legislatures, and others) must face squarely the issue of conflict between this basic, fundamental human right, so well established in our legal system and in our beliefs, and the limited resources which are available (or may be made available) for implementing the principle in the educational delivery system.

It is the belief of those on the Task Force that many (most) public bodies having this responsibility have either failed to consider the issue or have done so only superficially. Some have met the issue

with policy statements paying lip service to the principle of bringing equal educational opportunities beyond high school within reach of each citizen and yet have failed to establish a viable system of implementation. Still others have established a delivery system congruent with the goal, but left barriers and hazards preventing its functioning properly.

Ironically, just as the national consciousness appears to be preoccupied with nostalgia, a part of Americana is passing. Rural life styles, as a distinct subculture, are imperiled. While there appears to be a desire to escape from urban life and its attendant problems, the postsecondary educational delivery system is constrained by ill-conceived rigidities and technicalities and by ill-fitting structures and support systems for serving the clientele of the larger and less populated regions.

This Task Force holds that indeed there should be equal educational opportunity for those living in less populated areas, and that the rural community junior college is a vital component of the delivery system. The Task Force declares that it is in the public interest that rural community colleges maintain complete and comprehensive curricula and programs of service, even though these may cost more per person served.

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Directors of AACJC affirm and promote throughout its sphere of influence the following principle:

Equal educational opportunity demands that public policy making bodies provide for comprehensiveness in curriculum and in services in all its community college units regardless of size or geographic location.

It is suggested that the recommendation may be implemented in at least the following ways:

(1) Directs contacts with governmental agencies, boards, and public boards.

(2) Legislative liaison on shaping characteristics of bills.

(3) Publications

a. journal

b. special brochure

(4) Preparation of a monograph including a discussion of this viewpoint.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the AACJC Task Force on Rural Community Colleges, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1976.

William H. McCoy, Chairman

FINANCING THE SMALL COLLEGE

Few who have ever been exposed to a course in economics, and even most who have never been inside a college classroom, recognize the economy of size in business, religious, or other endeavors. Surely those in positions of leadership and policy making in higher education should understand such a concept exceedingly well. Nevertheless, funding formulae abound across the nation which ignore or deny this truth. Interestingly enough, many of these funding systems are justified by a rationale of "treating each institution alike."

Perhaps it is something of a paradox to suggest that such ideas of fairness are grossly unfair. Nevertheless, this Task Force declares that any system of division or resources among institutions which is based upon equal funding per unit is an inequitable system and is prejudicial toward the smaller rural community college. This is true whether the "unit" is that of FTE student, average daily attendance, student credit hours, student contact hours, credit hours by program, students by program, or most of the other commonly practiced systems.

Such funding systems translate into disadvantages for the smaller, rural community college in terms of:

A. Staffing. One specialist is required regardless of program size. There are definite staffing economies

in both general and specialized education which go with higher enrollment levels.

B. Laboratories and instruction equipment. There is at least a minimum level of equipment holdings necessary to operate a given program. These do not increase in direct proportion to enrollment gains.

C. Library and media resources. Minimal library holdings and media software are necessary for programs and/or courses within programs regardless of the number of students enrolled.

D. Space requirements and space utilization. A program, or perhaps a course, may require special purpose space allocation even though enrollments are limited. A smaller institution is likely to show a lower space utilization ratio for this and other reasons related to its size and its clientele. Standards used must of necessity recognize these differences.

E. Physical plant operation. The larger number of square feet per student necessary in the small rural college leads directly to a higher maintenance and utility cost per student.

F. Administrative services. Basic administrative functions must be performed regardless of the size of the institution.

Although these may increase with larger enrollments, they do not increase in direct proportion.

G. Student activities and student services. A broad spectrum of services of specialists must be made available in each institution regardless of size. Those most isolated geographically are likely to be the ones in greatest need of a stimulating program of activities and cultural events.

H. Staff development. In order to keep abreast of development and change, a more extensive and expensive in-service program for staff (both faculty and administrators in proportion to size) may be necessary to overcome geographic isolation and insulation from peers in the field.

The Task Force feels compelled to comment upon what has become an all too common a practice among state governments in the last year or so. This is the excision of a common percentage from the budgets of all state agencies and institutions to meet a financial crisis, real or imagined. Such actions are difficult for any educational institution to absorb since normally an extremely high percentage of their budgets is in personnel costs and already committed. For the smaller institutions, however, the range of flexibility for adjustment is even more limited. Also, the expansion of budgets by a common percentage tends to compound past budgetary

inequities and should be avoided in practice.

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Directors use all the means at its disposal to bring the truth of the following statement to the attention of all appropriate public policy making boards, state agencies, and legislative bodies:

> Equity in funding as a means of equalizing educational opportunities among the organizational units in any state system of public and community colleges depends upon the inclusion of some means, mathematical or other, of allowing for the higher costs of operation per unit within the smaller, rural community college.

Specifically the Task Force recommends that this be done by:

A. Preparation of a monograph including this viewpoint.

B. Preparation of a special monograph analyzing common resource allocation systems with recommendations for adaptation.

C. Broad distribution of these to public agencies, institutions, and legislative bodies.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the AACJC Task Force on Rural Community Colleges, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1976.

William H. McCoy, Chairman

SMALL COLLEGES AND ACCREDITING AGENCIES

Perhaps small, rural community colleges are victims of a special viral form of group paranoia which is transmitted as they meet in informal sessions in the itinerary of professional events. Real or imagined, rural community college people feel misunderstood and sometimes persecuted by various boards, organizations, state and federal agencies, and by accrediting associations. Not all their complaints may be valid, but the very real feeling that the smaller, rural college does not receive equitable treatment and consideration in the accrediting process is one which should not be minimized in significance.

Smaller community colleges often lack the services of an institutional research specialist and hence may not have on-going institutional research programs of an advanced level of sophistication. Thus they are hampered in producing the self-study document from existing data and in the accumulation of the evaluational studies which are often stressed in the current rationale of regional accrediting bodies. This lack of a well developed, continuing program of research is also a handicap in long range planning. Often a small, comparatively stable, rural community college may not have (and may not need) sophisticated planning documents to demonstrate that there is adequate concern for the future of the institution.

Of special significance is the disproportionately low number of visiting evaluators from smaller, rural institutions, and the apparent tendency too often to disregard the different background of the evaluator who may be sent to the rural community college. Even more serious is the commonly held view that when varying approval periods are practiced, the larger, urban institutions tend to draw longer cycles before revisitation than do the smaller rural community colleges. It appears to many that there is often an "assumed accreditability" of the larger, more prestigious institutions, both two-year and university level, whereas there is a "prove thyself" philosophy practiced in dealing with the smaller, rural colleges.

Administrators in rural colleges complain that often they are expected to have a spectrum of services and programs comparable to large institutions even though these are unfeasible financially. They feel there is an unmerited stress on "counting" and that standards are often more relevant for four year colleges and for the transfer curriculum than for a comprehensive institution. They observe that the evaluators often talk with "malcontents" within their colleges, give credence to their view, and never ask for the facts. They strongly recommend better training for evaluators and a screening program to eliminate those who practice inappropriate methods.

The Task Force recommends that the AACJC Board relay in some effective fashion these concerns to each regional accrediting body in the nation, and that the Board take a strong stand for the

following principle:

> Although qualitative accreditation is a common concern of institutions of all types and sizes, and thus may involve judgments and input from all sectors, the preponderance of weight in these judgments should rest with representatives from peer institutions.

To the small, rural college this means the inclusion of a majority of representatives from this sector on visiting teams to those institutions and more participation also in the decision making processes of accreditation. It suggests further that it would be as appropriate to include representatives from smaller, rural community colleges on visiting teams to institutions of different sizes and types as it is to include those representatives on teams sent into the rural community college.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the AACJC Task Force on Rural Community Colleges, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1976.

William H. McCoy, Chairman

Papers

FEDERAL AND STATE CONSTRAINTS ON SMALL COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Among the constraints upon equality of programs and services among the nation's two-year colleges are those arising from the state and federal bureaucracies.

Since most of the funding is state, most of the constraints are probably state-imposed. However, there is one area in which both types of agencies are equally culpable. This is the mass of reports which, under the guise of accountability, is placed upon all colleges. Besides the fact that most of them are of limited use, their preparation constitutes an undue burden on the small colleges which must drain off from student and faculty services the time of faculty, counselors, and administrators alike. The task is no less onerous because a college has all the data but an excess amount of time must be used to place them in the format required.

Most of the stumbling blocks are placed in the path of the small rural community colleges because legislators and other political powers do not understand the philosophy of two year colleges, do not realize the difference between the two year colleges and the four year, and most of all do not see the additional problems which come about from being small/rural.

The influx of federal funds would ordinarily be expected to help bring equity of educational experiences; but there are factors

which negate their effect. Some of them follow:

A. Small/rural colleges cannot qualify for many federal programs.

B. Very little federal money goes to projects that are college mission oriented.

C. A small/rural college does not have sufficient personnel available to:

1. ferret out the sources of funds, especially to ferret out what facet of the title is going to be favored in allocations for a particular year;

2. write the project in a form and manner to please the sophisticated federal readers;

3. promote the acceptance in Washington once it is submitted. This is a process which is allocated a full-time person in many large community colleges.

The Task Force wishes to emphasize that federal funds are not serving to equalize education for students of two year colleges.

It is suggested that these debilitating factors be attacked by:

A. disseminating the recommendations of this Task Force to all state agencies having responsibilities for governance of two year institutions;

B. contacting personally representatives of those federal agencies responsible for the constraints listed above in an effort to ease the situation;

C. publishing and disseminating a summary of studies presently being made on costs of reporting; and

D. suggesting to H.E.W. that some funds be reserved for approval of ideas (not projects) and then that the federal agencies should assist in the development of the ideas.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the AACJC Task Force on Rural Community Colleges, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1976.

William H. McCoy, Chairman

DEVELOPING THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Nearly a decade has passed since a monograph summarizing and describing the unique characteristics of the rural community colleges was produced and distributed by the AACJC.[1] Since that time only a few local or regional conference papers[2] and journal articles have prevented the literature of rural community colleges from reaching total decline.

To date, there exists no disciplined research effort that would differentially describe small rural-based two year institutions although they historically comprize over fifty percent (50%) of the American community-junior college movement.

The development of a specialized literature and research base is vital to the progress of the rural based community colleges. In order to overcome the informational lag on rural community colleges, the Task Force recommends the following:

A. That an AACJC monograph be produced on rural community colleges including an updated bibliography;

[1] 100,000 and Under: Occupational Education in the Rural Community Junior College, AACJC Monograph, 1968 (out-of-print).

[2] For example see: New Responses To New Problems Facing the Rural Community College, Proceedings of the 16th Annual Workshop - Southeastern Community College Leadership Program, Florida State University, 1975.

B. that a collection of literature on rural community colleges be established and maintained by the Association and other public and private agencies; foundations, and organizations;

C. that the Association make an effort to stimulate research and information collection on rural community colleges by various organizations and institutions; and

D. that the AACJC Journal devote a future issue to the status of the rural community colleges and make an effort to increase the frequency of articles of interest and applicability to the small rural-based institutions.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

MAR 16 1979

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

Adopted by unanimous vote of the AACJC Task Force on Rural Community Colleges, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1976.

William H. McCoy, Chairman